

CASE STUDY

Anatomy of a sexual-harassment report

Sally Smith (not her real name) was a PhD student working at a remote marine field station in North America when a field-research supervisor propositioned her. When she turned down his advances, he threatened to bar her access to the gear and equipment that she needed to complete her fellowship research. Then came the domineering body language and verbal abuse.

She told the field-station manager, but he did nothing. Well-meaning senior women colleagues advised her not to draw attention to herself. Confused and vulnerable, she was unsure what to do, and ended up forgoing her fellowship, unwilling to put herself under his control for a second field season. But she received an alternative source of funding and continued her field work in the area — which led to more frightening encounters with him.

Smith wrote down every detail: dates,

times and how the encounters made her feel. After her second field season, she took those records, along with every e-mail he had sent, to the ombudsman's office at her university. After she reported the harassment to the university's human-resources department, the perpetrator threatened to sue her for defamation. He ultimately lost his job, but later secured a post elsewhere, and Smith learned that he had continued to harass women.

"Unfortunately, speaking out is not always good for one's career, but it was worth the risk for me," she says. Now an assistant professor at a major university, Smith makes sure that her graduate students are prepared for safe, productive field experiences and know how to get help should they need it. That includes contacting her or the university ombudsman's office if they have intimidating encounters. **V.G.**

responsible for her graduate students. "We need to create a culture where incidents are rare and reporting is easy," she says.

CULTURAL SHIFT

The SAFE study is already starting to drive change. "While there have been anecdotes and whispers about harassment at field sites, scientists are trained to seek evidence in a methodical, quantitative way to confirm the presence of a problem," says Kate Clancy, a co-author of the SAFE paper and an anthropologist at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "We gave them the data."

And SEAC past president Tristram Kidder, an anthropologist at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri, is helping to craft clear guidelines on professional field conduct and expectations as well as on detailed harassment-reporting procedures. They will be published this year. Other organizations in Europe and elsewhere are conducting discipline-based surveys in biology, astronomy, ecology and anthropology.

Some organizations, among them the American Geophysical Union, have already created a policy. The Association of American Geographers will draft guidelines for preventing and reporting harassment at its meeting in April, and the American Anthropological Association last year issued a 'zero tolerance' stance on sexual harassment and is launching an initiative to help members prevent it or deal with it when it happens.

Some groups are raising awareness through seminars. The online Earth Science Women's Network, an international peer-mentoring

association, last autumn gave a presentation on field safety at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. "We talked about setting boundaries and expectations — about everything from living arrangements to working hours — before going into the field," says Erika Marin-Spiotta, a geographer at the university.

Others are working to change the culture of tacit acceptance nearer to home. Anthropologist Bob Muckle at Capilano University in Vancouver, Canada, says that he was stunned by the SAFE results. "I thought the stuff I had seen happen to female colleagues in the 1970s and 1980s had disappeared," he says. He has instituted a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment for the summer field school he directs, and gives students handouts that define harassment and provide contacts and phone numbers for reporting any such event.

Still, it will take more than lone actions or a few guidelines to effect a true cultural shift, say those who study the problem. Real change will come when the international scientific community decides, top-down and bottom-up, what constitutes acceptable behaviour. "Few things are simply a women's issue; this is a community issue," says SAFE co-author Julienne Rutherford, a biological anthropologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "Senior people in the hierarchy are more likely to be perpetrators. They are also the people who have the power to establish appropriate behaviour and what is acceptable in our work culture." ■

Virginia Gewin is a freelance writer in Portland, Oregon.

SOFTWARE

Career detective

Software that can track researchers' career progress is under development. It will automate the collection of data required to learn how and where young scientists get jobs. A team used data collected by the tool and by manual analysis to show that higher research output correlates with scientists' ability to move voluntarily between posts (A. Geuna *et al. Res. Policy* <http://doi.org/2hz>; 2015). Using researchers' names, the tool can mine web pages and CVs to identify affiliations and research productivity. The software could be used to reconstruct the career paths of researchers and to assess which factors are correlated with staying in academic positions or moving to another sector, says lead author Aldo Geuna, an economist at the University of Turin in Italy. The tool is openly available, he says, and developers and users are working to improve its algorithms.

EMPLOYMENT

Job dissatisfaction lasts

Women who dislike their job come to hate it more over time, even if they earn more, whereas men's job dissatisfaction stays much the same regardless of pay, according to a UK survey of 2,800 employees, which included scientists. Conversely, women and men who like their job enjoy it more as time passes. Kausik Chaudhuri at the University of Leeds, UK, a co-author of the study — called 'Job Satisfaction, Age and Tenure' — says the findings suggest that it does not become easier to adapt to a job that is not a good fit from the outset. Early-career researchers should therefore choose carefully in today's economic climate.

US RESEARCH FUNDING

Call to smooth bumps

Biomedical research advocates in the United States are calling for policy changes to ease boom-and-bust research-support cycles at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). In a joint report, United for Medical Research, a research advocacy group, and the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, a think tank in Washington DC, outline strategies to make the NIH budget more certain from year to year. These include apportioning federal funds for several years at a time and stipulating that any unspent funds can be rolled over to the next fiscal year.